



Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Germany offer pristine alpine surroundings that are sure to breathe a little more life into you.

Touch the sky

Why you should trek Germany's highest mountain 2007

You may call me a geek, but I have always thought there's something special about listening to John Denver's "Rocky Mountain High" while driving through the mountains. There's something redeeming about leaving your everyday routine behind for breathtaking scenery and fresh mountain air. Maybe you have fond memories of driving through the Rocky Mountains, Appalachian range, or any other of the countless natural treasures in the States. Luckily, you don't have to miss the great outdoors just because you are stationed in Europe.

Places like Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Germany offer pristine alpine surroundings that are sure to breathe a little more life into you. But what if you want more than to simply look at the mountains from afar? What if you would like to climb above the surroundings and

gaze out across alpine peaks stretching south to Italy? Then you would probably be interested in making the two-day trek up the Zugspitze, Germany's highest mountain.

We explain how you could turn an ordinary visit to Garmisch-Partenkirchen into an inspirational experience and personal accomplishment. So tighten up your bootlaces and adjust your rucksack.

What's your motivation?

What is it that motivates alpinists to climb treacherous peaks and risk their lives? Perhaps it's the challenge of doing something superhuman, extraordinary and dangerous. While the Zugspitze ascent is certainly challenging, its terrain is perfect for trekkers looking to conquer a serious alpine peak without the serious hazards that alpinists love. The Zugspitze trek is ideal for teens and adults with moderate hiking experience and sound judgment that don't quite feel comfortable mountaineering, but also don't find normal hiking much of a challenge anymore.

If you feel like you are ready to make the transition from hiking to trekking up Germany's highest peak, the most important thing to remember throughout your planning and eventual trek is to respect the mountain. That means getting in a little better shape if going up a flight of stairs takes your breath away, planning thoroughly, and resolving to abort the ascent if you don't feel safe. The good news is that if you are in reasonably good shape and navigate well, the Zugspitze ascent can be a lot of fun.

Hit the trail

For some people, the sound of trail gravel grinding underneath their hiking boots sets the soul free. It's the sound of freedom, of leaving civilization behind.

You may experience that too at the famous Partnachklamm gorge near the Olympia Skistadion in Garmisch where day one of the trek begins by following the Partnach River into the Reintal valley. The trail

along the Partnachklamm gorge takes trekkers deep into a rocky crevasse roaring with white water. After several minutes of walking the trail, trekkers suddenly emerge into an open valley and see a calmer Partnach River.

Over the next several kilometers, the trail follows the seemingly opaque turquoise waters of the Partnach River up a gradual incline in the lush forest. This is where trekkers will begin following the R1 trail towards the Bockhütte. The Bockhütte is one of three rustic cabins along the way to the top of the Zugspitze that offer refreshments and a bite to eat. Other cabins like the Reintalangerhütte and Knorrhütte additionally offer basic sleeping accommodations (so there's no need to pack a tent).

Welcome to serenity

After a short break at the Bockhütte, trekkers will find themselves in the majestic Reintal valley while following the venerable Via Alpina trail (which also includes the 801 and E4 trail designation) towards the Reintalangerhütte. Except for a few passing people, trekkers will find themselves isolated from civilization with only the sounds of flowing water and nature around them.

This section of the trail is relatively level, with only a few challenging inclines in the woods. The menthol-like air becomes cool, small flowers peek from underneath grey stones, and sheer rock faces climb thousands of feet on either side of the trail. It is truly a sight you won't soon forget.

The recommended stopping point for the first day's trek is the Reintalangerhütte (www.charly-wehrle.de). This cabin claims to have the most beautiful beer garden and definitely has plenty of rustic alpine atmosphere. The secluded cabin has a cozy dining room where you can relax your feet and enjoy a home cooked meal with other trekkers. There are often folk music presentations in the evening. The sleeping arrangements are Spartan, with rows of narrow mattresses with sheets in two levels in a few small rooms. While that adds to the experience, after a day of trekking, you will probably fall asleep



Partnach River



The Bockhütte is one of three rustic cabins along the way to the top of the Zugspitze.

quickly anyways. Each sleeping space costs 18 euro per person. The food is also more expensive than one might expect, but that is because the cabin is supplied by a helicopter and racks up a 10,000 euro transportation bill each season.

Considering that you don't have to carry a tent and a heavy dinner, most people are quite comfortable paying a little extra for the experience (which includes being woken in the morning to the sounds of accordions and guitars – and maybe even a Tibetan prayer song). Reserve your place at the Reintalangerhütte at least two weeks before your by calling +49 (0)8821-2903.

Up for the challenge

After a relaxing night at the Reintalangerhütte cabin, it will be time to set out on day two of the trek – the most challenging part of the journey. The landscape begins to change and a huge wall of

mountains climbs before you. From this point on, the ascent will be steep as a winding trail takes you over 2,000 feet up to the next cabin, the Knorrhütte. The trail winds up the face of a very steep incline, but it is relatively safe. As your heart pounds in your chest during the more challenging parts, it's important to drink water and pace yourself. During the ascent, it's a good idea to take frequent short breaks – especially if you aren't in the best of shape.

The ascent to the Knorrhütte is truly amazing. Trekkers are surrounded by massive, moss-covered cathedrals of grey stone and colorful wildflowers set against a blue sky that grows deeper in color the higher in altitude you climb. About 300 meters from the Knorrhütte, trekkers will have to negotiate a steep incline of loose rock. This is perhaps the most hazardous section of the trail. Here it is very important to lean into the incline during the ascent and maintain good balance. After such a heart-pumping effort, taking a well-deserved break at the Knorrhütte to hydrate and eat some snacks is a good idea.

The top of Germany

After a stop at the Knorrhütte, trekkers will continue on to the top of Germany. From this point on, the landscape transforms into a Martian-like moonscape of windswept rocks, patches of moss, and even mountain sheep with bells jingling spookily through the barren scenery. In the distance, Austrian and Italian peaks may be seen on a clear day.

From the Knorrhütte on, a narrow footpath leads steeply up towards the Zugspitze as clouds rush by. This is a modest introduction to high altitude trekking. Trekkers may be a little short of breath because of the thinner air and notice the cooler temperature, but altitude sickness usually isn't a problem. It is very important at this altitude – above 7,000 feet – to take short breaks and drink plenty of water, though.

During day two of the trek, it may feel as if the trail only leads straight up with the Zugspitze nowhere in sight. Once you crest one massive hill, it seems another is waiting.

But trekkers will find additional motivation once they reach 7,900 feet and can finally see the Zugspitze peak and cable car station on top. Once the peak is sighted, there remains only about another hour (depending on the conditions and snow cover) to reach the top by following the trail along the Austrian border.

Finally reaching the top of the Zugspitze is truly exhilarating. Although many trekkers will feel slightly sore and exhausted, the magnificent view and sense of accomplishment at having climbed nearly 9,000 feet with one’s own two feet is worth it. After taking photos and taking in the view, trekkers may be interested in eating a warm meal while relaxing tired feet at the mountaintop restaurant.

Luckily, you won’t have to trek all the way back down the mountain. From the peak of the Zugspitze, it is possible to take either a cable car or specialized cog wheel train back to Garmisch. As soon as trekkers arrive at the peak, they should check departure times and purchase tickets to make sure they don’t miss the last departure. The one-way ticket down costs 25.50 euro for adults and 19 euro for youths. Those staying at the Armed Forces Recreation Center in Garmisch may take a public bus back to Edelweiss Lodge or Vacation Village at the end of the descent. After such a demanding trek, you may want to consider treating yourself to a comfortable night in a hotel or lodge.

If you are looking for something more than just walking the streets of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, a trek up the Zugspitze offers great personal rewards and physical challenges. Although the trek is not for everyone, individuals or families with teenage children who are in relatively good shape and sense of adventure will not be disappointed with the Zugspitze trek. So what are you waiting for? If you are ready to see the Alps in a whole new way, make 2007 the year you conquer Germany’s tallest peak. Now that’s a story you can tell folks back home.

Recommended packing list:

- 35-liter capacity rucksack and raincover
- First aid kit and Band-Aid Advanced Healing
- Blister Cushions (available at commissaries)



At the top of Germany the landscape transforms into a Martian-like moonscape.

- 2-liter Camelbak hydration system
- 1-liter aluminum water storage flask
- 2 polyester T-shirts
- 1 long sleeve shirt (flannel is good)
- 1 pair of trekking pants (convertible to shorts) treated with weather-resistant spray.
- Sunscreen (high UV protection)
- Euro cash
- Map
- Small LED thumb flashlight
- Rain jacket and trousers (or poncho)
- Flip-flops (for showers in the cabin)
- Small towel
- Hygiene kit (keep it light)
- Snacks (trail mix, pretzels, beef jerky, etc.)
- Sunglasses
- Compass

Baseball cap or sweatband
Aluminum hiking poles
Camera
Sleeping wear

Find the way

We recommend the 1:30,000 scale KOMPASS map “Garmisch-Partenkirchen Mittenwald” number 790 (ISBN 3-85491-581-0) available at many German map and book shops. A CD-ROM version from KOMPASS called “Zugspitze Mieminger Kette” is also available for 17 euro for those wanting precise GPS coordinates and more custom printing options (ISBN 3-85491-654-X).

Links

www.zugspitze.de
Webcams, lift schedules, pricing, and more
www.charly-wehrle.de
Reintalangerhütte information

Looking for something easier?

That’s OK, there are some great hikes for beginners and families with small children. We recommend parking at the Olympia Skistadion and hiking past the swimming pool to get on the WB trail to alpine village of Wamberg. Take the WB1 up Eckbauer mountain. This gentle ascent is ideal for families and may be done in as little as two hours. Waiting at the top is a traditional Bavarian lodge and restaurant with a breathtaking view of the Alps. Be sure to take a picnic blanket along. A chairlift called the Eckbauerbahn is a fun way to end the trip and takes guests down the mountain to the Olympia Skistadion parking lot, where the hike began.

Good to know

Your dedicated reporter has compiled a quick list of tips and lessons learned the hard way so that you don’t have to.

- The prime time to trek the Zugspitze is from May to August. Trekkers will want to hit the trail no later than 9 a.m. each day.
- Wear two socks. A thin sock (such as the Army’s standard black

polyester dress sock) under a boot sock does wonders for relieving blister-creating friction.

- It sounds gross, but it really works wonders: Rub Vaseline on areas on the body prone to friction (shoulders, armpits, groin). If anything, Vaseline between the toes and around the heel helps tremendously to reduce blisters.
- Stay hydrated. Although Nalgene bottles and canteens are a good way to store drinking water, a two-liter CamelBak hydration system is the way to go. Having a hydration system encourages constant hydration on the move and will keep you refreshed at high altitude.
- In a May 2006 National Geographic Traveler comparison, Snickers candy bar was described as comparable to far more expensive energy bars. So if you are looking for an energy-packed snack, save some money and pack some Snickers from the commissary.
- Polyester is in! Polyester T-shirts dry quickly, unlike cotton blend shirts that stay wet and then add extra weight to your bag. Insider tip: Go Army. The tan standard issue 100% polyester moisture wicking T-shirt is a great value at the local Clothing Sales.
- Weather does change quickly on the trek, so be prepared for warm and cool weather. A fleece coat should do, just in case. Wind and rain resistant jackets are also a good idea if you plan to trek in August or September.
- Don’t over pack. Over-packing may lead to needless exhaustion. Plan on eating and sleeping at the cabins so you won’t have to carry sleeping bags, stoves and lots of water (available at the cabins).
- Don’t get burned. Apply sunscreen generously to exposed skin (especially the face, ears, and back of the neck). Burns can occur rapidly at high altitude, even in cool weather.

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